

PSALM 27: GOD IS GREAT

so we don't have to be in control

Meditation

Last week, Psalm 1 taught us that our emotions and actions are directly connected to whatever it is we are meditating on. Our lives are like a tree - the “fruit” that I am producing (my emotions and actions) is a direct result of whatever I’ve sunk my “roots” into (my meditations). While we often think of meditation as a “spiritual” activity, it is really just a fact of life - everyone meditates on something. The Hebrew word for meditation means “muttering” or “mumbling,” drawing our attention to the fact that we are all talking to ourselves about something! According to Psalm 1, if you want to experience deep happiness, contentment, and joy, you must sink your roots into - mumble to yourself! - God’s word. As Jesus said, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8.31-32). In other words, the truth of who God is as he has revealed himself in the Scriptures and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus will set you free only as you “abide” in it, rest in it, meditate on it, and come to really *know* it.

Unfortunately, most of us know the truth in our heads, but we don’t know it - deeply and powerfully - in our hearts. The Apostle Paul understood this, and prayed for his churches to “know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3.19). He also prayed that God would “open the eyes of [their] hearts,” asking that He would graciously cause the truth they know intellectually to become truth that shapes the very core of their being, bringing stable joy and humble confidence regardless of their circumstances (Eph. 1.18).

Over the course of our study in the Psalms, we are going to take one truth about who God is that many of us would readily affirm with our heads but seem to easily forget in the moment of trial. We’ll talk about what happens when we forget and don’t rejoice in this truth, tracing some of our negative emotions and sinful behaviors back to the gap between what we say we believe and what we actually believe in that moment. And then we’ll join with the Psalmists as they proclaim the truth about God to themselves and to us, allowing their meditation and worship to draw us into a deeper experience of this truth. In Psalm 27, we learn that God is Great, that he is in control, that he is sovereignly working in all of life’s details, and that he can be our refuge in the midst of chaos. Psalm 27 teaches that God is Great - so we don’t have to be in control!

Psalm 27

David, the great King and Psalmist, was very human. In this Psalm, we see him wrestling with a world much like our own, a world of unpredictability, of surprise, and often, of chaos. He experiences circumstances that are threatening to rob his peace and joy, threatening to “consume” him mentally and physically. He has enemies that “assail” him, armies that “encamp against” him, and “false witnesses” that speak evil against him. David lives in a world of chaos and unrest, a world where circumstances are rarely favorable.

While few of us experience the threat of physical violence as David did, we can all agree with him that life is quite often chaotic. We have our own overwhelming pressures in life - homework and grades, work or the lack of it, marriage and family, mortgages or rent, bills and bill collectors - most of which we have very little control over. In fact, if we're honest, there is almost nothing that we can control in this world, and we are more often than not just responding to the blessings and trials that come our way each day.

How do you respond to your own daily pressures? Do you find yourself easily overwhelmed, stressed-out, and anxious about all that is on your plate? Are you worried about what the future might hold and fearful of what you cannot control? Do you lash out at your coworkers, spouse, or kids when the chaos grows unmanageable? If so, then Psalm 27 is good news for you!

Is God Great?

In Psalm 27, David is reflecting on God's sovereignty over the often threatening chaos of life. Like each of us, David is tempted to have his emotions and his actions be based on his crazy circumstances. The chaos of life threatens to be more real and more weighty than the truth he knows about God, that God is great and mighty and in control. He's tempted to have his joy connected to the relative peacefulness of his circumstances rather than the truth of who God is.

What happens in your life when the chaos of your circumstances become more “real” than God's control over them? What happens to you when your day doesn't go the way you thought it would? When the house clutter threatens to swallow you? When you have undiagnosed pain? When the bills begin to pile up? When the unexpected visitor stops by? What negative emotions or sinful behaviors do you experience when you feel like you have lost control and are in over your head? Many of us experience anxiety, unrest, and a lack of peace in our hearts and minds. Our fears rise to the surface, and we act to try to regain control. We use our resources - words, actions, or emotions - in a frantic attempt to control people, manipulate circumstances, and restore order. As a result, we often express anger and frustration at those whom we love.

Mentally, you'd likely agree with the Scriptures regarding God's sovereign control. But in the moment of chaos, you are faced with some questions: Do I really believe that God is great, controlling all the details of life? Do I really believe that He knows what He is doing? Do I believe he is working it all out for His glory and my joy, even though I can't currently see how? Or do I believe the lie that I need order, structure, and control in order to experience joy and rest?

God IS Great!

It is in this moment, as he begins to feel the onslaught of life's chaos, that David begins to meditate on God's greatness: *God is in control of all the little details of life*. He begins to remind himself that God is not surprised by this chaos. He takes the truth he knows about God - God is Great - and he mumbles and mutters it to himself until his heart begins to rejoice in it. He begins to preach the truth to himself, and his meditation is what we have in Psalm 27!

"The LORD is my light and my salvation... the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (v.1) Notice he doesn't ask God to save him *out* of the chaotic circumstances; rather, he reminds himself that God IS his light and salvation in the midst of chaos, and therefore he does not need to fear. God is in control, and therefore David is "confident" (v.3) that God will "hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble." And because God is his refuge, David knows that his "head shall be lifted up above [his] enemies all around" (v.6). God may not bring peace to all his circumstances, but David will experience peace in his heart and mind, and therefore he is free to worship with "shouts of joy," and to "sing and make melody to the LORD" in the midst of the chaos (v.6)! Even when it looks like everything is going poorly ("my father and my mother have forsaken me"), David trusts that God is near and in control ("the LORD will take me in") (v.10). David prays that God would "lead [him] on a level path," a prayer that he'd know how to respond rightly in the midst of chaos, knowing that God is sovereignly in control. So David reminds himself: "Wait for the LORD" (v.14)!

God is Great, So We Don't Have to Be In Control

Psalm 27 ends with great assurance: "I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living" (v.13). David's faith is not "pie-in-the-sky" escapism; rather, as he has meditated on the character of God, His power and His control over all of life, David has come to rejoice in what he already knew to be true. The truth has set him free: he does not need peaceful circumstances in order to experience joy, and he does not need to be in control of life in order to be free of anxiety and fear! David comes to the settled resolution that God is Great: *He* is in control of circumstances, *He* is good, and *He* is working it all out for His glory and our good - so we don't have to be in control!

PSALM 27: GOD IS GREAT

praying psalm 27 daily to undermine your need for control

The Gospel Proves God's Greatness

If we dig a bit deeper into our need for control, we'll often find an even more subtle lie at its root: God may be in control, but he is obviously *not* good, or he wouldn't be letting *this* happen to me. We've subtly bought into the lie that God owes us a certain kind of life. Though we'd never admit it aloud, we've come to the conclusion that because we've lived a good life and have tried to obey God, he's now in our debt, and must make life go in a favorable way for us. It is a dangerous *lie* that is rooted in missing the cross.

Psalm 27 points forward to the cross, where God shows his goodness once and for all, proving that he is trustworthy regardless of our circumstances. On the cross, God saves us by sacrificing his Son, using the most terrible of circumstances as his means of blessing and healing the world. If he has done this for you, not only is he obviously good, he's also clearly in control, using even sin and hardship for the joy of all people. The *truth* is that God is committed to your abiding joy, not just your momentary happiness. In fact, if you base your joy on having control of your circumstances, the most gracious thing God can do is to *make life chaotic*. Like a loving Father, he's choosing to not give you what you want (control) in order to give you what you most need (Himself).

Daily and Moment by Moment

Psalm 27 breaks down into 2 sections. In vs.1-6, David is meditating on the greatness of God - his control over all things - in a moment of relative peace and calm. He isn't in that moment experiencing the pressures and chaos of life threatening to overwhelm him. However, in vs.7-17, the chaos has broken in, and he is crying out to God for rescue. Life is out of control, and so he prays!

As we learn to meditate on God's word, this is a great pattern to follow. The first 6 verses teach us to find time daily to read Scripture, meditate, and pray as a daily discipline. If you find that your negative emotions and sinful behaviors are often connected to life feeling out of your control, then daily remind yourself of this truth - God is Great - and really bring your heart to rejoice in it. In addition, you'll find your heart slipping away from joy in God throughout the day. You'll drift constantly from knowing God as your refuge to experiencing anxiety and fear and trying desperately to regain control. In those moments, follow the pattern of vs.7-17, and actually preach the truth to yourself *in the midsts of it!*